1: Turnbull E-4. 5 (1951-1955) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

Schebesta (1934) estimates the total population of the Ituri Mbuti to be more than 35,000, in an area of approximately 100,000 kilometers; Putnam's estimate was 40,000 within the same area. Lloyd (1899) gives the Pygmy population as fewer than 10,000, using information given to him by a Pygmy in the Central Ituri. According to this information the Pygmies inhabited the forest for a distance of seven days' march from east to west, and six days from north to south; and that there were 40 chiefs, each with from 40 to 200 followers, a few with as many as 500. There is no official count that can be drawn on, but Schebesta and Putnam both traveled extensively through the entire Ituri area, and the closeness of their estimates favors the acceptance of their figures as fair approximations. Lloyd's reference is interesting in that it gives some indication of what an individual Pygmy considers to be the extent of the Mbuti and their territory.

Reviewing his interpretation of demographic data collected on his first two visits to the Congo, as set out in "Die Bambuti Pygmäen vom Ituri," Schebesta (1952, 50–53) later says that among the Efe archers the average number of children born to each woman is three, of which two survive. He also finds that there is a

[1] Each hut represents a nuclear family—man, wife, and unmarried children.

[P.160-D]

2: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1965 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

121 There are two major difficulties facing any discussion of the Mbuti. One is the fact that while they are true hunters and gatherers, they are nonetheless associated in some way, and apparently closely so, with the surrounding forest cultivators. The inseparability of the two peoples makes it especially difficult to know where to begin, as the Mbuti are one thing in one context and a quite different thing in another context.

114 The other difficulty lies in the fact that previous sources have not given us a clear idea of the structure of either group, Mbuti or villagers, and have completely misled us as to the nature of the relationship between the two. I have dealt somewhat with the latter difficulty elsewhere (Turnbull, 1956) and propose to deal with the former difficulty by giving a brief sketch of the nature of Mbuti society that will adequately provide a basis for a preliminary investigation of the actual nature of the relationship between the Mbuti and the villagers. Only then can we safely attempt to understand the nature of Mbuti social structure, even in their forest society, as divorced as it may seem to be from the village context.

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161 It is impossible to give an accurate estimate of the population of the Mbuti of the Ituri Forest, as there has been nothing approaching an efficient census. Owing to the mobility of the individual hunting bands, and the lack of co-operation offered by villagers whenever queries are made about the number of Mbuti they "own," we must regard with suspicion any figures based on a count of bands attached to villages and an average band population. From my own experience, and from discussion with missionaries and administrators who have attempted counts, one way or another, I would hazard a guess at somewhere around 40,000, with no evidence to show that the population is increasing, but certainly none to show that it is decreasing.

619 The total population may be divided, as we have seen, into groups [224] that emphasize one hunting technology or another, the two main groups being the archers and the net-hunters. The spear-hunters also use bows and arrows for defense as well as for occasional individual hunting. None of these groups can be said to have any political identity, however, any more than can the Mbuti totality, except in opposition to the villagers.

621 The only effective political unit is the band, which we have defined

3: Turnbull E-5 (1951-1958) 1962 FO4 Pygmies FO4
Mbuti

hunting but also working on plantations, cutting wood and drawing water. None of this was true of the Pygmies that I knew. But I did agree with Schebesta about the *molimo* (a religious festival). Although he had not seen it himself, from what he heard about it and about similar practices among other groups of Pygmies, he felt sure that it was essentially different from the practices of neighboring Negroes, however similar they might appear to be on the surface. This certainly tallied with my own experience.

The general picture that emerged from his studies was that there were, living in the Ituri Forest, some 35,000 BaMbuti Pygmies, divided into three linguistic groups, speaking dialects of three major Negro languages. The Pygmies seemed to have lost their own language, due to the process of acculturation though traces remained, especially in tonal pattern. Only in the easternmost group did Schebesta feel that the language had survived to any recognizable extent. These were the Efe Pygmies who lived among the BaLese, an eastern Sudanic tribe with a not very savory reputation for cannibalism, witchcraft and sorcery.

But in spite of this linguistic difference, and the fact that the Efe also differed in that they did not hunt with nets but with bow and arrow and spear, Schebesta believed that all the BaMbuti were a single cultural unit. They tended to live in small groups of from three families upward, moving around the forest from camp to camp, though always attached to some Negro village with which they traded meat for plantation products. There was no form of chieftainship, and no mechanism for maintaining law and order, and it was difficult—from Schebesta's account—to see what prevented these isolated groups from falling into complete chaos. The most powerful unifying factor, it appeared, was the domination of the Pygmies by the Negroes. Schebesta cited the *nkumbi* initiation as an example of the way Negroes forced the BaMbuti to accept their authority and that of their tribal lore. Remembering what I had seen, living in an